

Message Text

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ACTION AF-10

INFO OCT-01 ISO-00 CIAE-00 DODE-00 PM-05 H-01 INR-10
L-03 NSAE-00 NSC-05 PA-01 SP-02 SS-15 ICA-11
AID-05 PC-01 HA-05 /075 W
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R 131700Z SEP 78
FM AMEMBASSY LAGOS
TO SECSTATE WASHDC 534
INFO AMCONSUL KADUNA

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E.O. 11652: GDS
TAGS: PGOV, PDEV, NI, SHUM
SUBJECT: OBASANJO APPEALS TO THE TRADITIONAL RULERS

REF: LAGOS 10677 (1977)

BEGIN SUMMARY: HEAD OF STATE OBASANJO HAS APPEALED TO
NIGERIA'S TRADITIONAL RULERS TO PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE
IN THE TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN RULE AND TO BE ABOVE
PARTISAN POLITICS. END SUMMARY

1. IN A SEPTEMBER 11 DODAN BARRACKS ADDRESS TO
THIRTY-EIGHT LEADING TRADITIONAL RULERS, FMG HEAD OF
STATE OBASANJO APPEALED TO THE TRADITIONAL RULERS TO
PLAY A POSITIVE ROLE IN NIGERIA'S TRANSITION TO CIVILIAN
RULE. FLANKED BY THE SULTAN OF SOKOTO AND CHIEF OF
STAFF YAR'ADUA, OBASANJO TOLD THE TRADITIONAL RULERS
THAT THEIR ROLE WOULD BE "CRUCIAL" IN ENSURING A
"SMOOTH TRANSITION" AND "PEACE AND STABILITY THEREAFTER".

2. POINTING TO THE TURBULENCE OF RECENT NIGERIAN
HISTORY AND THE CIVIL WAR, THE HEAD OF STATE SAID
BLUNTLY, "IT MUST NOW BE ACCEPTED THAT IF ALL OUR TRADI-
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TIONAL RULERS HAD LIVED UP TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES
AS LEADERS, THE COUNTRY WOULD PROBABLY HAVE AVOIDED
MOST OF THE TURBULENCE AND DESTRUCTION OF THE PAST."
OBASANGO THEN SAID:
"AS WE ARE ABOUT TO ENTER A NEW ERA, IT IS YOUR
RESPONSIBILITY TO PREVENT A RECURRENCE OF THE
MISTAKES OF THE PAST. RATHER, YOU SHOULD USE

THE FULL WEIGHT OF YOUR AUTHORITY TO BRING THE PEOPLE TO REASON WHENEVER THEY TEND TO GO ASTRAY. IN DOING THIS, YOU SHOULD BEAR IN MIND THAT AREAS OF DISINTEGRATION EXIST IN EVERY SOCIETY NO MATTER WHAT DEGREE OF COHESION MAY BE INDICATED BY THE FACADE. AND IN OUR OWN CASE THE FABRIC OF THE COHESION AND INTEGRATION OF OUR SOCIETY STILL NEEDS TO BE STRENGTHENED. IT IS YOUR DUTY TO DEVISE MEANS OF PROMOTING UNITY AND SOLIDARITY AMONGST THE VARIOUS NATIONAL GROUPS THAT CONSTITUTE OUR GREAT COUNTRY BY DELIBERATELY PLAYING DOWN DIFFERENCES THAT TEND TO DIVIDE US WHILE AT THE SAME TIME EXPLOITING TO THE FULLEST THOSE NATIONAL ATTRIBUTES THAT ENHANCE COHESION AND INTEGRATION IN THE FULL REALISATION THAT THE VARIOUS COMPONENTS OF THE NATION ARE DEPENDENT ON ONE ANOTHER."

CONCLUDING ON THAT THEME, OBASANJO URGED THE TRADITIONAL RULERS TO BE "ABOVE PARTISAN POLITICS AND PAROCHIAL INTERESTS."

3. RETURNING TO THE THEMES OF HIS JAJI SPEECH, REFTTEL, OBASANJO DECRIED THE DECLINE IN NIGERIAN AUTHORITY PATTERNS. HE COMMENTED, "EVERYWHERE, THERE IS EVIDENCE OF FLAGRANT DISREGARD FOR AUTHORITY AND A REFUSAL TO LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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UNDERTAKE PUBLIC SERVICE EXCEPT IN CONSIDERATION OF MATERIAL REWARDS. DESTRUCTION, CONFRONTATION AND LAWLESSNESS ARE NOW REGARDED FASHIONABLE AMONG OUR YOUTHS." HOWEVER, THE MISDEEDS OF NIGERIA'S YOUTH MERELY REFLECTED THE WEAKNESSES OF THE ELDERS OF SOCIETY.

"IT WAS NOT THE YOUTHS THAT ENGINEERED THE FRATRICIDAL SQUABBLES THAT BROUGHT DOWN THE FIRST REPUBLIC. IF WE HAD BEEN SUFFICIENTLY SENSIBLE AND TOLERANT, IF WE HAD APPROACHED THE CONSIDERATION OF NATIONAL ISSUES WITH THE SAME LEVEL OF HUMANENESS AND MAGNANIMITY FOR WHICH THE BLACK RACE IS SO FAMOUS, IF WE HAD NOT DISCARDED THE VIRTUES OF MODERATION, JUSTICE, FAIR PLAY AND CONSIDERATION FOR OTHERS WHICH HAD BEEN THE GUIDING PRINCIPLES OF OUR FOREBEARS IN ALL THEIR RELATIONSHIPS, IT IS CONCEIVABLE THAT WE WOULD HAVE ESCAPED MUCH OF THE CALAMITY THAT OVERWHELMED US."

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IN CONCLUSION, OBASANJO EXPRESSED HIS "APPRECIATION
TO ALL OUR TRADITIONAL AND COMMUNITY LEADERS WHO
HAVE LIVED UP TO THEIR RESPONSIBILITIES IN CO-OPERATING
WITH GOVERNMENT AT ALL LEVELS TO MAINTAIN PEACE, LAW
AND ORDER AMONGST OUR PEOPLE."

4. THE TRADITIONAL RULERS WHO WERE AT THE SESSION INCLUDED:

--ANAMBRA: OBI OF ONITSHA, CHIEF J.W. NWODO
BAUCHI: ALHAJI MOMONI, MALAM A. UMAR
BENDEL: EREJUWA OF WARRI, OTARU OF AUCHI
BENUE: ATTAH OF IGALA, TOR TIV
BORNO: SHEHU OF BORNUE, SHEHU OF DIKWA
GONGOLA: ALHAJI ALIYU MUSTAFA, ALHAJI R.R. YOLA
KANO: EMIR OF KANO, EMIR OF HADEJIA
KWARA: EMIR OF ILORIN, OHIMOYI OF IGBIRA
NIGER: ETSU NUPE, ALHAJI SAIDU NAMASKA
OGUN: ALAKE OF EGBALAND, AKARIGBO OF IJEBU-REMO
ONDO: OSEMAWE OF ONDO, ELEKOLE OF IKOLE
RIVERS: OBAYE SUKU AMACHREE, OBA CHUKUMEKA OBI
OYO: ALAFIN OF OYO, OWA OBODUN OF IJESHALAND
PLATEAU: CHIEF OF JOS, ALHAJI MUSTAPHA AGU II.
SOKOTO: THE SULTAN OF SOKOTO, EMIR OF ARGUNGU
KADUNA: EMIR OF KATSINA, EMIR OF ZARIA
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IMO: DR. DR. AKANU IBIAM, EZE S.M.A. UZOR
LAGOS: OBA OF LAGOS, AYANGBUNRIN OF IKORODU

CROSS RIVER: OBONG OF CALABAR, CHIEF PETER ALENE

5. ACCORDING TO PRESS REPORTS, OTHER IMPORTANT GROUPS IN NIGERIAN SOCIETY WILL ALSO BE ADDRESSED BY THE HEAD OF STATE IN A SIMILAR VEING.

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6. COMMENT: OBASANJO'S DEEP FEELING ABOUT THE DISORDERLY NATURE OF NIGERIAN SOCIETY AND ITS EFFECT UPON ECONOMIC PROGRESS AND POLITICAL STABILITY ARE WELL KNOWN AND WERE FIRST EXPRESSED IN HIS JAJI SPEECH. SINCE THEN, WE HAVE SEEN THE RELIGIOUS UNREST IN THE NORTH AND THE MIDDLE BELT UNLEASHED AS RESULT OF THE SHARIA BATTLE IN THE CONSTITUENT ASSEMBLY AND THE URBAN AND CAMPUS TURMOIL OF APRIL/MAY RESULTING FROM EVER INCREASING ECONOMIC PRESSURES. IN BOTH CASES, TRADITIONAL RULERS, RANGING FROM THE SHEHU OF BORNO THROUGH THE EMIR OF KEFFI TO THE OLUBANDAN OF IBADAN, HAVE HELPED TO RESTORE ORDER. THUS OBASANJO MAY FEEL THAT, USED PROPERLY, THE TRADITIONAL RULERS OF NIGERIA COULD BE AN IMPORTANT FORCE FOR STABILITY IN THE YEAR TO COME AND THEREAFTER.
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